

Country of Origin Labeling Program, Room 2092-S
Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), USDA, STOP 0249
1400 Independence Avenue, SW.
Washington, DC 20250-0249

Re: 68 FR 61944 - Mandatory Country of Origin Labeling of Beef, Lamb, Pork, Fish, Perishable
Agricultural Commodities, and Peanuts

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a graduate student from the University of Pennsylvania, School of Social Work. I am a concerned consumer as well as a case manager for individuals infected with HIV. It is my understanding that by September 2004, labels on perishable food products will have to provide country of origin information. However, I also understand that the omnibus spending bill contains provisions to delay mandatory country of origin labeling for two years. Therefore, in response to 68 FR 61944 (Mandatory Country of Origin Labeling of Beef, Lamb, Pork, Fish, Perishable Agricultural Commodities, and Peanuts), I am writing to urge you to produce effective guidelines for the mandatory country of origin labeling program, such as those recommended by the Americans for Country of Origin Labeling coalition.

As an HIV case manager, I work with individuals infected with the deadly disease on a daily basis. One of the most important aspects in working with this population is to ensure that each client's needs are met to the best of my ability. In doing so, it is in the hopes that each individual client will be able to obtain and maintain a better quality of life. In addition to the medication many of my clients are currently taking, the food they are consuming is also of extreme importance as it works to keep the individual alive and healthy. Consumers deserve more information regarding where their food was processed. American consumers are well aware as to where their clothing and furniture come from. So why do the same rules not apply to the food we consume?

Furthermore, recent virus outbreaks occurring in farms around the world further magnify the need for mandatory country of origin labeling. Mandatory country of origin labeling will give the United States power in determining whether certain agricultural commodities should be allowed to cross its borders. Unfortunately, regulations mandating country of origin labeling remains under debate at this time, and without country of origin labeling, consumers are unable to make informed decisions about the food they are purchasing and preparing.

In short, I urge you to make certain that the rules for mandatory country of origin labeling live up to their potential. These rules will provide American consumers with the knowledge that is necessary to make informed decisions regarding the food they eat. Most importantly, I believe mandatory country of origin labeling will benefit individuals living with HIV as they are often dependent on medication as well as food to maintain a better quality of life.

I believe these comments are valid and request that AMS will take them into consideration as the final decision is made. I thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Amy M. Lai, Graduate Student
University of Pennsylvania
School of Social Work